

## **SECULARISM IN AMERICA AND TURKEY AND**

### **FETHULLAH GULEN'S RESPONSE**

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The origins of the tension between the sacred or religious and the secular, at least in the West and especially for Christianity, date to an early theological perspective and its eventual consequences. No one has stated the matter more succinctly than historian of Christianity Albert Outler:

(Early) Christians were 'stuck' with their conviction that God is not absent anywhere. For them, the whole creation is sacral through and through (because of God's providence) and yet also secular throughout (because of man's responsibilities). From this laudable co-inherence, however, there then developed a widespread and fatal misconception: the dominance of the secular order by the sacerdotal. ...This issue was hopelessly corrupted when both sides agreed that what was 'secular' was not 'sacred' and vice versa—and then fought over the dividing line! This false disjunction still plagues us. (Outler, 1984, p. 64)

I would add that the plague has only intensified with the modern claim that only the secular exists and that the sacred is, at best, secondary and derivative or, at worst, downright anachronistic.

In this essay I seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion of the sacred and secular by proposing the following. First, I offer a general clarification of the idea of secularity by making distinctions in our language on the subject. Second, I examine briefly the forms of secularity in two nations: The United States and The Republic of Turkey. My aim is to indicate both differences and similarities in their respective approaches to the secular and the sacred. Third, I maintain that the work of Fethullah Gulen and the Gulen Movement make a significant contribution to a better way of addressing and resolving the tension between the secular and the sacred, especially in Turkey. I will further suggest one way in which Gulen's approach may inform related issues faced by the United States. The essay concludes with a critical assessment of Gulen's approach to secularism.

## **I**

Language associated with secularity has been, to say the least, ambiguous and often downright confusing. For example, what we now call "secularism" was commonly called "modernism" at the turn into the twentieth century. Modernism referred to the consequences of the eighteenth century Enlightenment in the West that introduced modern—as opposed to all previous—ways of interpreting our world and ourselves. But from whence do the terms "secular" and its cognates gain currency and dominance in our discourse? The answer belongs to the history of western modernity itself and the language that reveals it.

The Latin term, "saeculum" means simply "belonging to an age or a generation." It suggests immediate and mundane life in this present, as opposed to any other, dimension or world. The common usage of "secular" originated within the context of religion, not in opposition to it. Monks within the Catholic monastic system, who lived entirely within the

community, were known as “regulars” (later, “religious”). Monks who were obliged to stay outside of the community overnight or for extended periods became known as “seculars.” Still, however, the secular monks remained under and within the sacred monastic order. Consequently, we can see that “secular” itself does not necessarily mean contrary to the sacred or religious.

Only gradually, as noted earlier in the quotation from Outler, did the sacred and secular become polarized, “when both sides agreed that what was ‘secular’ was not ‘sacred’ and vice versa—and then fought over the dividing line.” (Outler, 1984, p. 64) Then, during the Enlightenment era this tension gave way to the notion of dismissing the sacred altogether in favor of the secular. This was especially the case as the eighteenth century ended and the nineteenth began to concretize the Enlightenment vision into modernity.

Before proceeding further, another word for secular that is more familiar in Turkish, derives from Latin through French: laic and laicism (laik in Turkish). The Latin “laicus” refers to the “laity,” that is, those within the religious community who have no ecclesiastical title or standing. They are not priests or religious officials but simply belong to the congregation of the faithful. Thus, like “secular,” the term “laic” originates within the religious community and does not originally mean outside the sacred or the religious. It, too, only gradually comes to mean other than religious or against religion. This shift in usage for both “secular” and “laic” reflects the historical movement toward splitting the sacred from the secular and elevating the secular at the expense of the sacred.

Beyond the question of language and usage, the substance at issue is the polarity or dialectic between the sacred and the secular. Though often described in other ways, they are indeed ancient distinctions dating to antiquity. In Robert Cole’s study, *The Secular Mind*, he traces this antiquity back to the root stories and metaphors in the Hebrew tradition. (Coles, 1999) Human existence, he maintains, has always found itself suspended within the distinction between the sacred and the secular. Although the tension has from time to time become polarized in the past, under modern conditions the bifurcation virtually defines the age. Earlier in the West the hegemony belonged to the sacred or sacerdotal. Since the Enlightenment the power has shifted dramatically in favor of the secular. Still, each pole persists, and it has been impossible for either to eliminate or fully master the other.

One example will suffice. In the nineteenth century, when academic scholars began studying the phenomenon of religion as a secular scholarly subject, one quite common way of grounding the discussion of religion was to posit a foundational distinction between “the sacred and the profane.” (“Profane” here is virtually synonymous with “secular.” Again, it derives from the Latin “profanus,” meaning “before or outside the temple.” The profane is what takes place in the streets under ordinary conditions.) Emile Durkheim built his entire sociology of religion on this distinction, and the noted historian of religion, Mircea Eliade, entitled his seminal text on the nature of religion, *The Sacred and the Profane*. (Eliade, 1987) To put the matter simply, religion can hardly be discussed, let alone understood, without the dialectic, sacred (sometimes holy) and secular (sometimes profane).

Based on the foregoing, I propose a modest taxonomy of how we employ the term “secular” and its cognates in relation to religion and the sacred. Secular here refers to the commonplace conditions of existence as lived in, and limited to, the intra-mundane world, that is, the world available to ordinary experience. When we speak of the secular, we are not necessarily referring to a hostile orientation to religion and the sacred. Everyone participates in the secular! We exist in the ordinary mundane stuff of personal and social life, the doing of this and that. This is the sense in which Robert Coles insists that “the secular mind” is

ubiquitous, even among the most religious. (Coles, 1999) Some deeply devout people maintain that whatever they do, whether praying or playing, is always done to sacred ends (as in, "the will of God" or "submission to Allah"). Nevertheless, when pursuing the ordinary interests and demands of living, they must and do follow the constraints shared with everyone else "in the streets," as it were. No one escapes what Heidegger calls "everydayness," and what is called here the secular.

Second, the cognate "secularization" indicates the process by which the secular is made increasingly central or dominant in the way we live. We might say, for instance, that modernity is an age in which secularity is touted to the neglect of the sacred or religious. The emergence of scientific reason, its method, and its offspring, technology, has led growing numbers of people simply to rely exclusively or primarily on the resources available to human manipulation and thereby to neglect or ignore issues that serve to expose the fundamental limits of secularity. Even the most pious are easily caught in this process of living on the strength of our human ingenuity, despite whatever faith may be espoused. It is difficult to avoid the dynamics of secularization! Again, to quote Coles, "...religious practice as a motion of sorts in the course of ordinary living, (is) one more exercise of the secular mind." (Coles, 1999, p. 5)

To be sure, there are people and movements within this "secular age" that resist the process of secularization and elect to live in ways counter to it. Nevertheless, the ethos of modernity, and indeed postmodernity as well, is marked by the strident process of secularization.

Third, a more striking cognate, "secularism," takes us to the core of the issue in this essay. Secular-ism, as with all "isms," tends to harden the idea of the secular into ideology. It brackets, sets aside, or rejects the sacred altogether. Earlier manifestations of this, especially in philosophical thought, were naturalism, then materialism, and finally, positivism. All of them constructed metaphysical schemes that read out of the picture, among other things, any sense of the "other worldly" or of Transcendence. For secularism, all that is worthy of human attention can be reduced to what human beings can understand and master by their own intelligence, energy, and manipulation. All else is aesthetic distraction, ephemeral imaginings, or illusion.

Religion need not array itself against the secular as such. Indeed, it cannot. All religion, because it is constituted and expressed "in this present world," necessarily encounters, employs, and responds to the secular dimension. The process of secularization, especially since the Enlightenment, can and does pose a challenge to religion by its persistent tendency to encroach upon and reduce the sacred dimension. For contemporary religion in particular, a significant part of its energy is expended in confronting and resisting the excesses of secularization—or, in succumbing to the secular lure. It is secularism, however, that presents a frontal assault on religion as such, offering alternative ways of construing the meaning and fulfillment of human existence. Paul Tillich calls these alternatives "quasi-religions" in that they claim some sort of worldly ultimacy or finality, and he includes among them fascism, communism, nationalism, and some versions of liberal humanism. (Tillich, 1961, p. 5) Extreme consumptive capitalism might well be added to this list.

This general discussion of secularity and its historical development serves to prepare the way for a more concrete consideration of its influence in two specific settings: America and Turkey. We turn now to that subject.

## II

Both the process of secularization and the ideology of secularism are now global in their reach. Their emergence in Europe and America has led, through colonialism and more recently through a world-embracing economic expansion, to the encroachment of the secular ethos into virtually every corner of the world.

Why, then, single out America and Turkey for consideration on the subject of secularity in relation to religion? Superficially the answer is that this conference, taking place in America, is inspired by a Turkish movement, and secularity has a specific history in each of these countries. More importantly, both countries have specific historical and conceptual attitudes toward the relation of the sacred and the secular that make them especially fruitful for study. Both nations have engaged directly the relation of the sacred and the secular within the body politic. While they are not the only countries to do so, they provide acute and continuing examples of the engagement. By better understanding how America and Turkey have articulated and struggled with secularity in relation to religion we may discover more about the nature of the dialectic, as well as the particular contribution Fethullah Gulen and his movement are making toward addressing and resolving the sacred-secular tension.

***First, secularization and secularism in America.*** The roots of America and the American perspective lie in the European Enlightenment of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The problem of the sacred-secular tension in its modern form had its birth in the horror of religious wars that led to the necessity of finding a new course for coping with diversity within religion. The crisis took place within western Christianity, but it set the stage, unwittingly, for our contemporary consideration of diversity among all religions. How can religions allow for and tolerate each other? Part of the response to this query after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 was to begin distinguishing more sharply between the sacred and the secular. John Locke's *A Letter Concerning Toleration* provides a benchmark of this process. (Locke, 1990) Eventually this led to the splitting of sacred and secular and insisting that the secular prevail over the differences between and among religions.

America entered the picture during this ferment in Europe and inherited the problem of the relation between sacred and secular with respect to the state. Her formal solution, wrought after considerable conflict and collaboration, is found in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights, appended to the Constitution of the United States. It reads as follows: "The Government shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion; nor prohibit the free exercise thereof."

Ostensibly this statement finds a middle ground between state-sanctioned religion (theocracy being but the extreme version) and prohibiting or limiting the practice of religion. The state is to be neutral with respect to religion but is to protect people in their various practices of religion. This sounds good on paper, but after 219 years of application the matter remains entangled in ambiguity and perpetual controversy. (Perhaps this is as it should be. This allows the so-called principle of separation to be a "living" issue constantly subject to ongoing consideration, but if so, it means perennial vigilance against the overextension of either clause of the principle.)

Perhaps the most vexing issue raised by the First Amendment is that of the state's neutrality regarding religion. This amounts to the state being strictly secular. In fact, this is often stated to be the case. As Coles puts the matter:

...the degree of formal secularization has obviously shifted over the centuries. The United States itself is a nation explicitly founded by people who chafed under one

or another kind of ecclesiastical authority: we are, it can be said, the first modern nation founded as explicitly secular—that is, in response to societies where secularism was one of a number of competing ways of thinking. (Coles, 1999, p. 43)

But the state remains only ambiguously secular. Everything from prayers before legislative sessions to “In God We Trust” on the currency to “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance suggests that the state is not fully, or at least consistently, secular. Social theorist Robert Bellah goes further to say that, in America, there is a general religiosity metaphorically rooted in Hebrew and Christian images but most explicitly American. He calls it “American Civil Religion.” (Bellah, 1992) While his interpretation is quite controversial, he makes a compelling case for a peculiar religiosity smuggled into the body politic and honored on major occasions with God-laced speeches by the country’s leaders.

Thus, America is and has always been ambivalent about the sacred-secular tension within it. The American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, in a work entitled *Pious and Secular America*, observes, “America is at once the most pious and the most secular of nations.” (Niebuhr, 1964, p. 1) This assessment rings true. The country seems never to have embraced itself as a purely secular nation, certainly not in the definitive mode of secularism, such as in contemporary France. Secularism, of course, is ever-present and sometimes vocal, but it has never become popular sentiment among the people. Nor is it overtly embraced within the body-politic. It would not win votes! Granted, secularization is a rampant process within American cultural life. Religion itself is constantly being co-opted or captured by secularizing interests, including otherwise quite secular political agendas. Yet, religion persists, often loud if not clear, in making itself heard.

To put the case bluntly, America is currently an entangled mass of competing and cooperating secular-sacred tensions. This is reflected explicitly in the political dynamics of the day. At one pole is a strident secularism suffering from its minority status. At the opposite pole is a brash movement of Christian extremists vying to take over the government and to “return” America to its supposed status as “a Christian nation.” The majority of citizens find themselves somewhere between these extremes, leaning toward one or the other. In light of this critical situation the efforts of Fethullah Gulen and his movement, although in a notably different socio-historical context, may prove instructive in the American setting. As a preliminary to examining this possibility, some general comments on the sacred-secular dynamic in Turkey are warranted.

***Second, secularization and secularism in Turkey.*** For two and a half years I have been studying and experiencing Turkey and the Turkish ethos. One of my earliest and most striking discoveries was the acute secularism of the state and the long conflict it has precipitated. Already I have learned much, particularly in light of Gulen and his movement’s response to Turkish secularism, that is informative for my understanding of the problem in general.

That Turkey is historically Islamic, and during most of the Ottoman era theocratically so, is the important point of departure. Indeed, I venture to suggest that Turkey is more Islamic in some respects than America is Christian. America was founded in the midst of the sacred-secular controversy, while the Ottoman Empire arose and thrived with Islam consciously at its center. While the empire was tolerant of other religions and allowed them to thrive, the population’s foundational religious identity was Islamic.

A second observation, that the Islamic identity of Turkish people has been under notable assault since the birth of the Republic in 1924, is equally significant. This fact places Turkey squarely in the context of modernity and its general ferment on the relation between the sacred and the secular.

When compared to the parallel process in America, Turkey's struggle between Islam and secularity is distinct in at least three respects: its struggle is relatively recent, relatively rapid, and relatively radical. Each of these distinctions invites examination.

Turkey's encounter with secularity and its opposition to Islam is relatively recent in that America, as a child of the European Enlightenment, had its birth pangs in the controversy over the relation between the sacred and the secular. In contrast, Turkey enjoyed a relatively stable devotion to Islam throughout most of the Ottoman era. I say "most," because there is evidence that, in the nineteenth century prior to its collapse, the Ottoman Empire had, by virtue of its exposure and reaction to European culture, already begun subtle and implicit—and sometimes blatant—processes of secularization.

To offer one example, in an article entitled, "The Tra(ve)ils of Secularism, Islam in Museums from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic." The author, Wendy M. K. Shaw, traces the developments of museums—under European influence—as a secularizing impact on the empire. (Peterson/Shaw, 2002, Ch. 8) Speaking of museums as "secular temples," she shows how, in the late nineteenth century the empire's leadership embraced the idea of museums as a way of historicizing and grounding its traditions in antiquity. In doing so, it muted and diminished the role of Islam in its portrayal. Only near the end of the Empire and the beginning of the Republic did Islamic artifacts come into play, but this occurred in order to sustain loyalty among the populous.

A second difference between secularity in America and in Turkey is that Turkey's encounter was considerably more rapid. The roots of western secularity hark back at least to the Renaissance, and some argue that Christianity itself contains an implicit encouragement of secularization by virtue of its sharp distinction between God and everything else. By contrast, in Turkey and the Ottoman Empire the secular dimension, while always present, remained thoroughly under the hegemony of the Islamic ethos. This only began to change through growing contact with Europe and European influence upon the Ottomans. Moreover, this influence remained mostly at the top, among leaders and the elite. In the meantime the cultural center of life remained Islamic in its fundamental self-identity. One would hardly imagine a thorough-going secularist in the context of classic Ottoman/Turkish life.

While change is a constant in human experience, the more rapid the change the more disorienting it is for people. When rapid change intrudes on the sense of personal, social, and cultural continuity, it produces confusion and division among a people. With the revolution which produced the Turkish Republic this sudden shift took place between religion and a strident secularism. Turkey has been in shock from this change for much of the twentieth century, as witnessed by various military coups for political purposes and upheavals during that period. The people did not have time to adapt, let alone respond with alternatives. These have only gradually emerged, and the Gulen movement stands at the center of this process.

A third distinction between America and Turkey with respect to the sacred-secular tension, is that Turkey's process was much more radical. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's regime, from the outset, insisted that Turkey become a radically secularized state and that religion, that is, Islam, be relegated to the strictly private sphere. Islam was to have no influence in matters of state, and even in the context of general socio-cultural life, it was muted and discouraged.

To be sure, a certain ambiguity in this stance came into play early and from time to time gained strength. The Kemalist state was obliged to “use” Islam to assuage anxiety among the populace, because the Islamic ethos and identity remained so dominant among the people. In other words, whenever it served the Republic to use Islam, it did so, but always with the intent of keeping the religion as much under wraps as possible.

The sense in which Turkey’s struggle with secularism is more radical than America’s lies in the fact that America openly allows for “the free exercise” of religion (and not only Christianity), while the Turkish state virtually prohibits it (and explicitly Islam) by relegating it to the private familial context. Granted, in American history, there are those, including the great founder Thomas Jefferson, who view religion as likewise a private matter: religion should stay out of the state’s business altogether!

In fact, herein lies the key issue for any secular state: what is to be the relation of the sacred, in the actual lives of citizens, to the secular state? Must religion be utterly private? Is this even possible for a religion? If not, what is a proper public function for the sacred, the religious, within a strictly secularist state? This is an acute question for any democracy, and it is currently at the center of the political and cultural agenda in America, as well as in Turkey. But in Turkey the matter is more radical due to the state’s inclination to act more immediately and directly to challenges of its state secularism. Thus, a more subtle response offers greater promise. As we shall see, this is where the work of Fethullah Gulen comes so forcibly into play.

### **III**

Fethullah Gulen was born in 1941, only three years after Mustafa Kemal Ataturk’s death in 1938. This fact is somewhat symbolic, in the sense that Gulen was to become the most formidable challenger of the overreaching secularism of the Kemalist era. I say “overreaching,” because Turkish secularism explicitly excludes the legitimacy of religion and the sacred, especially in the public sphere of, not only the state but ideally of socio-cultural life as well. Although American state secularism also broaches this danger zone from time to time, in practice the sacred has always played a much more public role in the American body-politic than is allowed in the Turkish state. If nothing else, the Christian Bible continues to be the document on which Presidents of the United States swear allegiance.

Gulen is, above all, a man of faith, a definitively devout Muslim whose identity is bound to Islam. Moreover, second only to this fact, he is Turkish/Ottoman and bound to its history and traditions. He sees no conflict between these two loyalties, because they are, in his reading, correlative. Thus, he articulates his vision out of a particular history, a specific past, while holding that Islam transcends particular times and places. In fact, this is part of his wisdom. While firmly convinced that Islam contains in its core (specifically the Qur’an and the Hadith) the universal truth, he is astute in realizing that it must be subject to perpetual interpretation in light of the historical and cultural contexts which it seeks to address. Thus, although his deep faith commitment may make him appear rigid and fixated, he is actually devoted to the ceaseless process of making the sacred (via Islam) pertinent to the age (i.e., to the secular). This is what motivates his challenge to secularism. He believes nothing can be more pertinent to any time or place than the sacred!

The focus of the perennial relevance of the sacred is ethics. In Gulen’s view, no secularist, positivist approach to common life can hope to provide the universal values necessary for people to live together in a fulfilling way. In America we sometimes say that science and strict rationality cannot provide meaning to guide living. Gulen is saying much the

same of ethics and its sacred basis in Islam. He is convinced that no state, let alone society or culture, can sustain itself and serve its own humanity without a grounding in morality, and morality, at least for him, is grounded only in the sacred.

Nevertheless, and this is key to his position on secularity, Gulen does not directly challenge the state or its secularism. His is not a political solution. He by no means wishes to set aside the secular state and replace it with an Islamic one (although his opposition within the state has often accused him of this ambition). Indeed, he is thoroughly loyal to the state on the grounds that it is needed to protect Islam. What he seeks, as Ahmet Kuru puts it, is "a middle way between modernity and Muslim tradition." (Yavuz/Kuru, 2003) He does not reject modernity but develops his own version of modernity, one that does not include the excesses of secularism in its denial of the sacred. He does not equate "modern" with "secularist." Yet, he does not deny or reject the secular as such. He is committed to the modern capitalist economy, although critical of its excesses, as well as to education in science, and to successful living in the world all make it clear that he embraces the secular without bowing to secularism. This is part of his middle way.

Gulen's principal strategies for realizing his vision are two: education and dialogue. The movement he has spawned is implementing the call to provide a thorough education for children and youth that is at once fully modern, especially in its focus on science, and ethical. While the underpinning of the system is devoutly Islamic, his schools do not overtly teach or concentrate on Islam. Reliance is placed on the quality of the teachers and their character to convey the ethical.

The interest in dialogue is virtually an extension of the commitment to education. Through education generations of devoted, informed, and open young people will, Gulen believes, insure that dialogue across cultural and religious differences occurs in the interest of tolerance and global peace.

These strategies are designed to by-pass direct challenges to state-based secularism. As an advocate of public activism, Gulen and his movement strive to enhance their world by providing a more profound ethical orientation. Education and dialogue are the means. He holds that, once a "critical mass" of educated and devoted young people is active in the society, secularism will give way to a more democratic system in which religion and the spiritual needs of people are respected.

Gulen himself, while leaving much of the work increasingly to his many followers and supporters, is and has been crucial to the success of his vision. Thus, a word about him as a person is in order. A year ago my wife and I were privileged to spend a day with him at the compound where he lives in Pennsylvania. He immediately struck us as a man of quiet integrity and profound devotion to his faith. Beyond that, he is a good listener and is interested in understanding his world. He is cognizant of the more profound global issues currently at stake, and he continues to seek ways of addressing them.

In terms of Gulen's general disposition, my reading of his works and meeting with him, along with meeting many in movement he has spawned, suggest that he is at once intensely engaged, pragmatic, open to change, and dialectical in his thinking. This preserves him from being overly dogmatic or summarily absolutist. His ability to discern two sides of any argument and to seek a way to mediate them is especially attractive. This dialectical skill serves him especially well with regard to the subject at hand: he does not reject the modern or the secular, but he refuses to "absolutize" the secular or to countenance secularism. Rather, place of secularity in personal and communal contexts must be worked through in relation to

the sacred and the call to more ultimate universalizable values by which humanity can live together.

These dispositional qualities have led Gulen through a process of change from a more parochial and tradition-centered orientation to an increasingly global perspective. Recent and current points of view, since his coming to America, have turned to a more worldly-wise way of construing the task before him and his movement. While he continues to urge a community-centered devotion to Islam and its ethical message, he urges those inspired by his teachings and the movement's supporters to take this devotion into the public sphere by living fully in the world without losing their sense of sacred grounding and of community. He is forever seeking ways to mediate life in the world (the secular) with the demands of faith (the sacred).

## **Conclusion**

How, then, might the efforts of Gulen and his movement speak to the American scene? First, we must grant that the contexts remain quite different, and we cannot assume that what works in one setting will serve as well in another. Nevertheless, his work does offer some pertinent suggestions.

America is currently polarized in a number of respects, and one of them has to do with the role of the sacred or religious in the context of secularity. America continues to suffer from two extremes: either that America must be taken over by Christianity and become "a Christian nation" or that America is a thoroughly secular nation and religion should be either rejected or relegated to the private sphere. Stated in these extremes, the situation is closer to that of Turkey than we might otherwise think. If so, is there a "middle way," as Gulen wants to provide?

Yes, I believe there is a middle way, one not unlike Gulen's own. On the one hand, religion and the sacred should stay out of state affairs. The nub of this idea is simply that religion does not provide reliable grounds for making policy designed for the entire populace. All efforts even to hint at a theocracy or theocratic power in the halls of political decision making are misguided if not delusional. Gulen appears to appreciate this in his constant rejection of the very thought of an Islamic state!

On the other hand, religion is not to be relegated to the private sphere of the individual and family. Thus, the head-on rejection of secularism! Religion, precisely because it includes profoundly moral commitments and generally calls followers to compassion and service in the world, belongs in the public sphere. The questions are how, to what extent, and in what venue. Gulen has chosen education, a promising domain to encourage change in the world. America, in this respect, is more fluid and diverse in its options, but there are endless ways, one of them certainly being education, to engage the public domain without interfering in the religious neutrality of the state, a neutrality designed to protect the growing diversity in sacred and religious matters.

Gulen's perspective, while specifically directed at conditions in Turkey, meets a quite similar attitude in America. He is not alone in seeking a "middle way," but his general attitude is implicit in more moderate views on the sacred-secular tension among Americans, whether from within the religious or the secular sphere. Moderate and liberal Christians and citizens sympathetic to the free exercise of religion sound remarkably close to Gulen's message, albeit within a quite different political and social environment.

Thus far, Gulen's vision and program appear pertinent, not only to Turkey but to America as well. However, I conclude by raising four critical questions regarding his overall approach.

First, Gulen's approach is profoundly Islamic. I would by no means question his right to express his faith or to encourage others to do the same. Further, Turkey remains, culturally speaking, definitively Islamic (as noted earlier, more so than America is Christian). But what about the role and contribution of other religions? What about them in Turkey? Gulen himself has encouraged interfaith engagement within Turkey, and this is promising. The movement inspired by Gulen further embraces dialogue and speaks of tolerance, but the English word "tolerance" is a minimal term and only the beginning of a process leading to dialogue. Dialogue means serious engagement with the "other" in order to understand and appreciate—and indeed, learn from—them. Further, dialogue points further to direct action in cooperation with the interests and commitments of other faiths. It respects, for example, that so called "universal values" are also mediated through other religions. The Gulen movement may well be open to these possibilities of dialogue, but I have not encountered them in a definitive form thus far.

Second, Gulen's approach to an ethic of universal values appears to ground it exclusively in the sacred. This implicitly rejects the possibility of secular people or societies possessing an ethic grounded in more or less humanistic ideals that do not appeal to any sacred ground for them. If followers of Gulen are to engage adequately the secular age as their mission, they will be obliged to acknowledge at least this much: that many, who do not hold to any particular sacred orientation, nevertheless appeal to and live by seriously held ethical principles. Moreover, they consider these principles universally applicable. Genuine dialogue will need to include their voice.

Third, Gulen's strategy is predominantly communitarian. It goes without saying that the role of community must be central in any attempt to sustain life together. Moreover, Americans are in great need of appreciating and recovering the centrality of communal life. Our strident individualism is as much out of balance as is excessive communitarianism. We need balance, but balance cuts both ways. I sense in the Gulen movement a tendency toward tight conformism and collective "group think," as we call it in America. Both America and Turkey could benefit from consideration of this fundamental balance between individuation and participation. This balance is a necessary basis for both harmony and fruitful conflict in the pursuit of life together. Conflict is not the enemy of harmony but a contributor to it, if only the balance is sustained.

Fourth, Gulen's more recent emphasis on world involvement can lead to a growing secularization. For instance, he and his movement encourage full participation in capitalism. Although they also stress generosity and self-sacrificial giving to an admirable extent—what I call "compassionate capitalism"—I have yet to see or read of any systematic criticism of capitalism itself, only its excesses. I would argue, in fact, that capitalism is a decisive player in the global expansion of secularism. This is not to reject all capitalism by any means, but a critical participation in it is necessary to transcending it in the interest of those sacred—and/or secular—universal values under consideration.

These critical notes are offered only to encourage the continued development of Gulen's vision and his movement's strategies for realizing it. Let us all continue to walk this taut tightrope.

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